

SOMALIA: The Forgotten Minorities

Abdifatah Abdi HARED

Department of Political Science and Public Administration
 Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University, Nyzen Tevfik Sk. No: 15 Ankara/Turkey

Abstract

Somalis have long since been represented as a homogenous ethnic society with a common myth of origin (patrilineal descent from a common ancestor), a common language (Somali), common religion (Sunni Islam) and common customs (particularly related to pastoral-nomadism and camel husbandry) (Lewis 1961; Laitin and Samatar 1987). Reviews of a list of literature have shown that the country's economy, politics, and social issues have been controlling by the ordinary Somalis whereas minority communities have been marginalized and sometimes even oppressed and exploited to take part the decision-making process, state building, and elections in Somalia. The study focused on the issues of identity-based politics on minority groups in Somalia for their political participation, job opportunities, marriage, and the right of property. Since Somalia's political system is based on clan political system and the country exercises what politicians call 4.5 law "A power-sharing formula." The paper argued that "4.5 laws" is what makes minorities in Somalia more vulnerable and creates inequality between and among Somalian people. According to the definition given to "4.5 law" is a power-sharing mechanism in which the selection of political system in Somalia is based on. This 4.5 Formula gives more power and chance of selection to (majority clan) in the elections and gives less political power to minority groups in Somalia.

Keywords: Somalia, Minority, Majority, Clan, Inequality, Power, Political, and Election.

Introduction

Somalis have long since been represented as a homogenous ethnic society with a common myth of origin (patrilineal descent from a common ancestor), a common language (Somali), common religion (Sunni Islam) and common customs (particularly related to pastoral-nomadism and camel husbandry) (Lewis 1961; Laitin and Samatar 1987). Considering the population of Somalia as estimated by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFP) is 12.3 million people. While the accurate number of minority communities living in Somalia has not been established yet.

The citizenship of Somalia is based on patrilineal decent people with a Somalia father were considered Somali, regardless of their clan and their place of origin of residence. In legal terms, minorities such as Bantu, and other minorities are seen as full-fledged citizens; however, these minority groups were massively discriminated against in many aspects of political, social, and economic life. Since the collapse of the central government of Somalia in 1991 minorities has been suffering continues discrimination against their life's.

Clan-families and sub-clans define the social and political structure of Somalia, and everyone's possession in the society is described that clan system. Luling 2006; Mohamed 2007). Critics argued that economic and social inequalities and hierarchies of minorities were ignored, and also minorities suffer denial and abuse of the whole range of fundamental human rights and face continuous discrimination against their life (Samatar 1992; Ahmed 1995; Besteman 1996).

Although minorities love and consider Somalia as their country, their identity as minorities continues to see them excluded from politics and socio-economic empowerment. Taking in to account the last election, Somalia moved to a federal system, where the country knows has an upper house "Aqalka Sare" for the first time in the history of the country, the selection of the parliament and the upper house is guided by the 4.5 law where elders from the four major clans select representatives to represent their interest. However, the selection of elders and elections of parliament were accompanied by these major tribes, minorities did not get a right to participate this registration of genuine elders, and they are unable to exercise their rights as a citizen.

The minority group in Somalia includes Bantu, Bravenese, Rer Hamar, Tumul. These minorities have been giving the minority identity based on unconstructed words by the societies, while others argue Bantu and other minorities come to Somalia as Slavery for a long period of time since to date these minority communities continue to live in conditions of high poverty and suffer numerous forms of discrimination and exclusion and above all identity-based politics has appeared in modern days in Somalia towards minority communities.

Minority communities in Somalia are considered inferior, without full rights in Social, political and economic sectors in the society. In addition to that minorities were systematically excluded from the mainstream prominent positions in government and the few minorities who held public office positions had no power to speak on behalf of their communities and their families. Furthermore, as a result of their minority identity, some minorities have suffered systematic confiscation of their property and lands.

Based on the understanding of identity based political and social problems towards minority communities in

Somalia will lead to answering the following questions:

1. How are minorities treated in Somalia?
2. Where do the minorities who live in Somalia come from?
3. What are the problems with representation of minorities in Somalia?
4. What are the recommendations that could fundamentally change the community life of minorities in Somalia?

Somalia Regions Map



Source: Mos

Understanding minorities in Somalia:

The situation of minorities must be considered in the context of Somalia in the last 50 years and during state collapse, which Somalia has experienced a civil war, drought, humanitarian disaster and massive violations of fundamental human rights that have affected all Somalis, majorities and minorities alike. However, after state collapse in 1991 the international community, human rights organizations and the UN organizations gave much attention on the issues related to minorities in Somalia because minority groups have been suffering inadequate protection, employment, education, property land and massive discrimination in Somali for decades.

Currently, Somalia is structured as a parliamentary federal state, with a bicameral parliament - the House of Peoples Representatives (Golaha Shacabka) and the House of the Upper house (Aqalka Sare). The Federalism system in Somalia encompasses five federal member states, namely, Puntland, Galmudug, Hirshabeele, Jubba-land, Konfur-galbeed state of Somalia. The separation of power between these federal member states and the federal government of Somalia has not yet been defined, and it seems that the issue of minority rights in Somalia

has been forgotten and minorities are dying out there and have many hidden problems. I argue that the Somalis lack of minority rights and inadequate attention from the government to their existence made them more vulnerable and in danger. Concerning Martins argument about minority communities seems essential, he said that the social, cultural and traditional clan structure formed by the majority clans in Somalia continues to exclude minority communities from inter-marriage between majorities and minorities, political participation, education discrimination and employment; and even limits their access to justice where abuse has been perpetrated against them in recent years. (*Martin hill 2010*)

The origin of minorities

Considering Somalis academic literature and other scholars who studied Somali state identity haven't been agreed on the concept of the origin of the minorities in Somalia. Some have argued that minorities are originally from Somalia, and they are Somalis but, socially structured propaganda made them minority, while other scholars argued that minorities have been brought into Somalia as Slavery during late 18th centuries by Arab slavers arguing most of them come from Tanzania, South Africa, and Mozambique.

Bantu: The Bantu communities are believed to be descendants people from East and Central Africa mainly they are from Tanzania, Mozambique, and Malawi, brought into Somalia by the Arab slave traders. Most of the Bantu are small-scale farmers who live in the riverine areas along the Juba and Shabelle rivers, the only permanent rivers that run through southern Somalia. (Eno, 2008) It is not a difficult task for Somalis to discriminate against the Somali Bantu given the Bantu's phenotypic features, which are distinct from those of the Somali (Lehman et al., 2002). Some of these "Negroid" physical features that would distinguish them from the "mainstream" Somali are the Bantu's kinky hair texture, dark skin, and broad nose.

Baravnese and Rerhamar: The Baravnese and Rerhamar are also believed to be descendants of immigrant settlers from Yemen and Far East African countries. These communities settled in coastal towns of southern Somalia some ten centuries ago. Most of them are traders.

Bajuni: The Bajuni are people related to the coastal people (Waswahili) along the Eastern African Coast. They live in Kismayo and the Islands of Jula, Madoga, Satarani, Raskamboni, Bungabo, Dudey, Koyoma and Jovay (Bajuni Islands). They are a seafaring community.

Identity-based problems towards minorities in Somalia

Prohibition on inter-marriage: Despite the customary prohibition by the majority clans on intermarriage with a minority communities, the relationships have historically probably always taken place. This restriction on intermarriage between minority communities and majority clans has excluded minorities from forms of clan support or advancement through marriage ties. Nowadays there are very few civil society organization and minority activist advocating and trying to remove this culture of a prohibition on inter-marriage but, still there are no much improvements made.

Economic exclusion: Economic dominance is one of the most severe socio-economic problems facing the minority communities since Somalia got its independence in 1960, the major clans at the expense of minority groups have dominated social and political affairs of the country. This trend has continued more than years after the collapse of the Somali central government.

According to UN report 2002. In Kismayo, there are some commercial sources such as the seaport, and the airport. The Majority clans control all airport and sea port commercial activities. Those who do not belong to these majority clans and particular the Bantu and Bajuni work only as underpaid servants. Moreover, "Somaliland" Hargeisa (the capital city of a self-declared republic) there are nearly five telephone companies, five money transfer companies, big hotels, several light industries, transportation and construction agencies and ticket printing companies; all of which create hundreds of job opportunities. The minorities communities claim that these job opportunities are offered according to the clan identity of the individual. The minorities have no access to these jobs because of their minority identity (UN report 2002).

During armed conflict: Somali was marked by the most intense conflict, civil war, and different Warlords, clan factions fought for control of land and resources in Somalia especially south and central areas. Much of the country has been governed by the major clans. During that period, the situation of minority groups deteriorated when the armed conflict broke out in the south and northern Somalia. Some minority communities such as the Galgala, Gaboye, and Yibir were perceived as enemies because of their working relationship with the Siyad Barre regime as UN report in 2010 indicates.

Educational discrimination: In the educational system, due to discrimination minorities are unable to send their children to school and since 1991 minorities become unproductive. A survey found shows that less than 20 percent of children of the minority families interviewed send their children to school while the remaining 80% are unable to send their kids to college. (VOSOMWO's 2006)

Week Political representation: Somalia doesn't have an electoral democracy, one man, one vote, the country's election parliamentary is selected through a clan-based political representative system, what so-called "4.5

Formula" This formula which I further going to explore in the paper gives an equal opportunity of seat to the most prominent four major clans, and just half of their number goes to minority clans and small groups in Somalia. I argue that 4.5 formula of selection of representative of Somalia, a discriminatory approach because this formula equalized representation of the four majority clans, and gave to the minorities overall roughly half the number of seats assigned to each of the majority clan-families. Additionally, there are still no structure and policies in place that ensures the rights of the minority communities in Somalia and the government of Somalia lacks to give minorities a chance to participate the political decision-making process of the country.

The rule of law: The rule of law is one of the most important principles of good governance, In the case of Somalia; there is no separation of power between and among the federal member states and also in the areas controlled by Al-Shabaab. There is no clear division of labor between the ministers, and most important position of the government run by the majority clan. Yet, the influence of minority communities in the executive and both legislatures (Upper and Lower house) is very low.

Somalia's 4.5 systems and Minorities

The 4.5 Law is a power-sharing formula that the selection of the cabinets and parliaments in Somalia is based on. I argued 4.5 formula a discrimination policy against minorities in Somalia. The law gives neither clear recognition for minority rights in Somalia nor an explicit representation in a political system. '4.5' law the controversial power-sharing formula, provides equal political representation to majority clans, while the minorities receive a half-share as a collective, for instance, Somalis (Majority clans) considers themselves **1**, while the (minorities) are considered **0.5** as the formula indicates, this law is purely against the minority rights and has attracted continued criticism since its inception in 2004.

Taking into account the election that took place in 2012 the four major clans are each guaranteed 61 seats out of a total of 275 seats in the parliament, while minority clans have only 31 seats. The minority communities can't be able to speak out against this law. So, the researcher argues if we increase 4.5 laws to just five will provide minorities more rights with better representation and better development of the regions they live in and their families. Furthermore, the argument that minorities should be given greater representation, creating jobs and recognition depends on the eliminating of this 4.5 formula.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the analysis of identity-based problems facing minority communities in Somalia. The researcher has given examples of identifying issues of discrimination against minority communities, the study also discussed the origin of minorities, the different arguments about their appearance in Somalia. The paper argued that the government of Somalia gave little attention to minorities and excluded them an essential position in the government bodies. The Somali Bantu who has been living in Somalia for over two centuries did not receive full rights as Somalis do. The study has found that the government of Somalia doesn't have any policy and programs supporting the minorities so that they would have full political rights in the future but, instead the government has a system called "4.5 Formula" which makes minority communities more vulnerable. The researcher calls Minorities in Somalia no one cries for them, and no one gives attention.

Recommendation

In this research study, the following suggestions have been made for the protection of the rights of minority communities in Somalia.

- The so-called 4.5 formulas should be re-assessed immediately to ensure equal rights for all Somalis.
- A support program for minorities should be developed in consultation with Somali minority activist, minority elders and human rights organizations.
- The Federal Government of Somalia is now reviewing the Constitution of the country. The study, however, recommends the new constitution must explicitly recognize the country's minority, and establish their rights to equality and non- discrimination in line with human rights standards.
- Awareness rising must be ensured to support minority rights especially education, health, and economic employment.
- The need to support the participation of minorities in public life and civil society organization.
- The need to develop projects and programs aimed at supporting the rights of women from minority groups, especially women and children who experience discrimination against their way of life.
- United Nations development organizations should establish development programs and should directly support minority organization that targets and directly reach out to the needs of minority communities in Somalia.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Prof. Dr. Yilmaz BİNGÖL Chair of Department of Political

Science and Public Administration at Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University, for the patient guidance, encouragement, and advice he has provided throughout my time as his student on identity politics and comparative political studies. I would also like to thank Abdi HARED for his financial assistance.

Reference

- Adam, Hussein, and Ford, Richard, (eds), *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st century*, Lawrenceville, NJ, Red Sea Press, 1997.
- Bantu Rehabilitation Trust, *Study of the Human Rights Abuse Against the Somali Bantus*, Nairobi, ACORD, 1995.
- David D. Laitin and Said S. Samatar. *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*. (Profiles/Nations of Contemporary Africa.) Boulder, Colo.: Westview or Gower, London. 1987.
- Eno, M. A. (2008). *The Bantu - Jareer Somalis: Unearthing Apartheid in the Horn of Africa*.
- Eno, O. A., & Eno, M. A. (2008b). *The Making of a Modern Diaspora: The Resettlement Ethnic and Racial Studies Publication details, Continuities and changes regarding minorities in Somalia* Markus V. Hoehne
Published online: 4.2014 <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rers20>
- Lewis, Ioan M. 1961. *A Pastoral Democracy. A Study of Pastoralism and Politics among the*
- Luling, V. 2006. "Genealogy as Theory, Genealogy as Tool: Aspects of Somali 'Clanship'."
- Samatar, A. I. 1992. "Destruction of State and Society in Somalia: Beyond the Tribal Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa. Oxford: Oxford University Press.